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ABSTRACT

The article discusses three Russian language textbooks for speakers of English which represent a new trend in Russian pedagogical materials, that of minicourses for specialists in specific disciplines. The three textbooks are: S. H. Gould, "Russian for Mathematicians" (New York, 1972), G. P. M. Walker, "Russian for Librarians" (London, 1973), and R. Kent, "Reading the Russian Language" (New York, 1973). Each textbook uses a different approach to the task of learning to read Russian. Gould's approach is through vocabulary recognition by concentrating on the mastery of some 77 highly productive roots and a smaller number of suffixes and prefixes. It is a sophisticated and original approach which should prove successful for mathematicians and for specialists in other disciplines as well. The major portion of Walker's book deals with topics such as transliteration, cataloging, acquisition, bibliographic and reference works, etc. It may be more useful as a textbook in an introductory course in Slavic librarianship for students who already know some Russian. Kent's textbook is also intended primarily for librarians. Its unique feature is that, after a brief introduction to the alphabet, the students start translating actual titles of articles and books by looking up words in a dictionary and somehow inferring the relational meaning conveyed by the inflectional endings. (Author/CLK)

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SOME RECENT RUSSIAN PEDAGOGICAL MATERIALS

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The purpose of this review article is to survey briefly several recent Russian language publications which seem to represent a new trend in the field, a trend toward mini-courses for specialists in specific disciplines. Considering the relatively small percentage of total foreign language enrollments that Russian has been able to attract in this country, the publishing companies over the past twenty years or so have brought out a surprisingly large number of manuals devoted to various aspects of Russian. A recent survey of available high school and college textbooks[1] listed some thirty-five titles currently used in beginning and intermediate Russian classes in this country. A search of the card catalog of a library with a good Russian collection would probably double this number. If we add to this the various "Russian for scientists" textbooks, readers, dictionaries, special studies, etc., the number of titles becomes quite large. It is interesting to speculate why the publishers keep bringing out so many new titles. One reason may be the belief that there is a large number of potential students of Russian in our schools and in the academic and scientific communities who might be attracted to Russian if only a suitable manual could be produced.

The three titles reviewed below represent a significant departure from the traditional Russian textbooks, whether of the four-skills or the reading-only type, by being deliberately written for specialists in a single discipline. Their specilization comes

primarily from the vocabulary, thus making them similar to the so-called special register materials commonly used in teaching English in non-English-speaking countries, with one important difference: the special register English courses are usually on the advanced level, while these Russian language courses are on the beginning level. The three titles are: S. H. Gould, Russian for Mathematicians (New York, 1972), G. P. M. Walker, Russian for Librarians (London, 1973), and Rosalind Kent, Reading the Russian Language: a guide for librarians and other professionals (New York, 1974).

Gould's manual is by far the best of the three. In many respects it can serve as a model worthy of imitation by anyone who might be moved to write a similar manual for his discipline. Gould recognizes two basic facts about Russian, especially scientific Russian: 1) the main problem in mastering Russian is the vocabulary,[2] and 2) a large portion of Russian scientific vocabulary is based on an extremely small number of roots, or represents transparent borrowings from western scientific terminology. Thus after brief but adequate chapters on the alphabet, pronunciation, inflection and verbal aspect, Gould devotes the greater part of the manual to vocabulary and to reading passages illustrating the use of the vocabulary.

The organization of the vocabulary chapter is indicative of Gould's approach: section one gives the general method of the chapter, sections 2-4 cover six roots which, together with recognizable cognates, account for 50% of Russian scientific terminology, according to Gould. These six roots are: to lead/conduct, to carry, to go/come, to take, to lay/put, and to stand. Gould frequently compares sets of Russian related words (usually loan translations) to similar sets of Latin-based words in English; e.g.

Russian lag-/log-/lož- and Latin pos- 'to lay/put': Russian iz-lož-enie, Latin ex-pos-ition, pred-lož-enie--pro-pos-ition, raz-lož-enie--de-com-pos-ition, etc. The derived words are always illustrated with appropriate words, phrases and sentences from mathematical literature. This is then followed by exercises which typically consist of two parts: a list of words with glosses to be read aloud, and a list of sentences with English translation. It is not clear whether the student is to simply read these sentences or whether he is to attempt to translate them. If the latter, it would have been better not to put the translation right under the sentence.

Section 5 of the vocabulary chapter deals with eleven adjective roots which are highly productive for derivation of Russian nouns and (especially) verbs: equal, full, right, many, single, near, long, general, wide, evident, clear. Section 6 lists and illustrates twenty Russian roots of "considerable" productivity and section 7 deals with forty roots of "moderate" productivity (Gould's characterizations). A student who learns to recognize these seventy-seven roots in combination with a fairly small number of prefixes and a smaller number of suffixes will not have to resort to his dictionary very often in reading mathematical literature in Russian.

The final section of the book (72 pages) consists of graded reading passages from various fields of mathematics. There is very useful cross-referencing from the reading passages to the vocabulary chapter and there is also an adequate glossary.

Although this is a reading manual, Gould rightly encourages the user to read the material aloud. His sections on alphabet and pronunciation and his painstaking accent markings throughout the book make this a realizable goal. There is no question in my mind that Gould's book would make a successful classroom textbook in a reading course for scientific Russian. Its effectiveness as a self-study manual will be marred somewhat by the paucity of information on syntax. Being able to arrive at a translation of each word in a sequence does not always lead to a correct understanding of the sequence. If this were the case we would by now probably have little need for manuals such as Gould's, since Russian-English machine translation would be providing us with cheap and rapid translation of Russian scientific literature. The lack of information on syntax, common to almost all language textbooks, can be remedied in a classroom situation by additional explanations from the instructor. The poor self-study student will need additional help also. A careful and perceptive user will find help in the examples with English translations. It would have helped even more if Gould had provided inter-linear translations for some of the reading passages, with notes for some of the more troublesome constructs. For additional (generally small) defects of Gould's book, see Robert Rothstein's review in Slavic and East European Journal 18 (1974), 97-9.

Russian for Librarians is somewhat of a misnomer for Walker's textbook. Only the first 28 of the book's 126 pages are devoted to the Russian language, with the remaining portion covering topics such as transliteration, cataloging, acquisition, bibliographies and reference works, and helpful hints in identifying other East European languages. The book is clearly more suitable as a text-

book in a beginning course in Slavic librarianship than as a manual for learning to read Russian. The strong point of the book is the special library vocabulary and the many titles of Russian references found in all sections of the book. The skimpy coverage of the grammar would be more suitable as a review for someone who had a semester of a regular Russian reading course. Very probably a librarian with such a background could use Walker's manual on self-study basis as well.

The Russian language section is sprinkled with errors of the type made by beginning students of Russian: wrong endings, lack of agreement, misspellings, etc. The errors are definitely not typographical, which makes one wonder how Walker learned his Russian. More serious than these errors are the errors of omission. Walker barely touches on such important points as the -sja verbs, verbal aspect, participles and gerunds. Since points such as these occur commonly in titles of books and articles, it is difficult to imagine anyone acquiring a useful reading facility in Russian from Walker's manual alone.

Kent's manual, although also intended for librarians, is devoted entirely to the Russian language. Unlike Gould and Walker, who first present more or less systematically the structure of Russian and then procede to reading exercises, Kent believes the students should start translating immediately and learn as they do. Thus after a brief (but adequate for the purposes) introduction to the Russian alphabet, the students are asked to translate the following title: Sovremennye problemy obsluživanija čitatelej. "Modern problems of servicing readers." Not one of these four words

occurs in the dictionary in this shape. but the students are expected to disregard the last one or two letters and to take the meanings of the most closely resembling form in the dictionary.[3] Assuming that the students were successful in their dictionary search, they would come up with the following: modern/contemporary/ up-to-date problem service/maintenance/servicing reader. Arriving at the correct translation from this sequence of glosses without knowing the relational meanings provided by the endings is not as simple as Kent implies.

The exercises that follow are of the same type, only even more difficult, with various grammar points scattered in almost random fashion among the several chapters. As an example, the important introductory material on the verb is attached to the chapter on personal pronouns, but there is a separate chapter on the past tense, which is the simplest of all Russian verbal forms. The past passive participle is included in the chapter on future tenses, and the present active participle in the chapter on word formation, etc., etc. If there is some system or logic in the arrangement, it escapes this reader.

Mrs. Kent claims that by using the materials in her manual she is able to give librarians useful reading command of Russian in a one-semester course meeting only fifteen times. What is meant by useful is not clear, but the claim is nevertheless impressive. She is now hopeful that her book will prove equally successful for self-study users. This I seriously doubt.

The idea of beginning level special register courses in Russian is an appealing one. Gould provides a model of such a course

in his Russian for Mathematicians. In fact, the first five chapters of his manual would be almost as appropriate for any other scientific Russian manual provided appropriate reading passages and glossary are added, and more self-correcting exercises are provided throughout the book.

NOTES

[1]Claire Walker. "Textbooks of the Sixties for 1970," Slavic and East European Journal 14 (1969), 207-17, and "More Texts of the 1960's and 1970," SEEJ 15 (1971), 61-5.

[2]For a discussion of this point see Howard Aronson. "On Teaching Russian Vocabulary and the State of the Discipline," SEEJ 14 (1970), 475-83.

[3]Students using Kent's manual would have to buy The Learner's Russian-English Dictionary by Lapidus and Shevtsov. (Cambridge, 1963), because Kent's glosses in the exercises throughout her manual are taken from this dictionary. The reason for selecting this dictionary, as Kent points out, is the greater amount of grammatical information included with the Russian entries than in most of the larger Russian-English dictionaries. However, its small format (3500 words) and its emphasis on basic every-day vocabulary make this dictionary unsuitable for general use beyond the second-year Russian course.